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## PROLEGOMENA TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.

### III.

#### THE NATURE AND TASK OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.

THE chief distinction between individual and social psychology is simply one of point of view. The point of view in the one is the individual, in the other the social group. There are other distinctions, but this is the fundamental one. Were it possible to explain everything while maintaining the standpoint of the individual, there would be no demand for and no need of a social psychology. But throughout the organic world group-life is a fact no less tangible and real than individual life. If from one point of view it is possible to see only individuals in the world, from another, and not less objective, point of view it is possible to see only social groups in which the individual appears as an element. Likewise, in the realm of psychical phenomena, we may consider either the psychical life of the individual or the psychical life of the group in which the individual life has its being. Both points of view are necessary for any adequate understanding of human life on its psychical side; they are supplementary to each other, and yield a science which is philosophically a unity. The separation of social from individual psychology is, then, wholly a matter of convenience; merely a division of labor which in no way implies a dualism between the two branches of the science. When the center of interest lies in explaining the psychical life of the group, many facts come into view which in explaining the mental life of the individual are unimportant or not prominent. On this account the existence of social psychology as a separate discipline is justified as a matter of practical convenience, although logically it is but a branch of the general science of psychology.

The individual cannot be isolated from the group in the real world, nor the group from the individual. They are related as the part is to the whole, as the cell is to the organism. Knowledge

of the one is necessary to the understanding of the other; and it is only the possibility of two points of view, of two centers of interest, which makes possible any division of labor between the psychology which considers the individual and the psychology which studies the group-life. So long as the center of interest is in the individual—in explaining his psychical constitution, activities, and development—we are in the field of individual psychology, no matter what the subject-matter that we are dealing with objectively may be. But whenever the center of interest is in the group, in explaining its organization, activities, and development, we are in the field of social psychology. Thus, individual psychology has a perfect right to consider the psychical life of the group in order to throw light upon the individual mind; while social psychology must study the individual, because the whole with which it deals is a complex made up of individual elements. An illustration from the history of biological science may serve to make our meaning clearer. At one time it was thought that in order to understand the organism it was necessary only to study the cell; that from the nature of the cell the development, structure, and activities of the whole organism could be explained. It is now generally admitted, however, that the organism cannot be explained from the point of view of the cell alone, but that the point of view of the organism as a whole must also be taken if we are to understand many things concerning its structure and development. The organism is no longer regarded merely as the sum of cellular activities, but rather as a single process. Thus, modern biology studies the organism as a functional unity as well as an aggregation of cells, using the one point of view to supplement the other. The analogous development in the history of the social sciences need hardly be pointed out. Individualism has assumed to be able fully to explain society from the nature of the individual; but gradually it has been perceived that society itself must be regarded as an organic, functioning unity before the social process can be understood. As to its origin, then, social psychology is simply an expression of the need of considering the social process on its subjective side from the standpoint of

the social whole, just as individual psychology is an expression of the need of understanding the subjective nature of the individual.

If the above positions are correct, it is evident that the only social psychology which is possible is a psychology of the activities and development of the social group, a "functional psychology of the collective mind," as we shall see later that it may be termed. The genesis of the social feelings in the individual cannot possibly be made the subject-matter of social psychology, as some recent writers have attempted to do,<sup>1</sup> if it be once admitted that individual psychology has the right to exploit the whole universe in order to explain the psychical nature of the individual. Nor can the psychology of the behavior of an individual in the presence of another of its own species be called social psychology, for the same reason. Both of these important fields of research, belonging as they do to individual psychology, must be carefully distinguished from social or group psychology, if the latter is not to be involved in unnecessary confusion with the former. Nevertheless, in these two provinces of investigation individual psychology approaches closely to the proper territory of social psychology, and there can be little profit in trying to set up a hard and fast boundary between them, since the one science is necessarily dependent upon the other for completeness of view.

While social psychology may be thus comparatively easily

<sup>1</sup> See especially an article on "Social Psychology and Sociology," by GUSTAVO TOSTI, in the *Psychological Review* for July, 1898. Dr. Tosti seems to recognize the weakness of his position, for he says: "Social psychology is to be conceived as a mere name for a chapter of [individual] genetic psychology." It could not, indeed, be otherwise; for a science studying the rise and growth of the "social state of mind" could not be isolated from general genetic psychology. What we have called "social psychology," however — viz., the law of the phenomena dependent upon the interaction of individual minds — Dr. Tosti calls "sociology." He even goes so far as to speak of the work of Lazarus and Steinthal as distinctively sociological rather than psychological. The quarrel can be, therefore, only one about names; for Dr. Tosti evidently means by "sociology" exactly what we mean by "social psychology." But with a recent writer in this JOURNAL (Vol. IV, p. 671, note) we would like to suggest, *à propos* of such attempts to confine sociology to the consideration of purely psychological phenomena, that biological sociology "may one day wreak a poetic vengeance upon those who are so fond of proclaiming its defunct condition."

differentiated from individual psychology, it would seem less easy to differentiate it from sociology. Is not this psychology of the functioning and development of social groups, it may be asked, just what is meant by sociology? Is not a psychological interpretation of the social process the only "sociology" attainable? Many writers are inclined to answer such questions in the affirmative, but from our point of view the answer is plainly negative. Sociology seeks an all-sided interpretation of the social process, while social psychology gives but a one-sided interpretation. Sociology seeks a complete view of the life of society, and, therefore, considers objective quite as much as subjective factors; it turns to biology as much as to psychology for the explanation of societary facts; it is a synthetic, philosophic discipline which seeks to reach the widest generalizations concerning the life of society through a synthesis of the results of special sciences. Sociology, in brief, is social philosophy, and is no more to be identified with the special sciences from which it draws its materials than general philosophy is to be identified with a summation of the results of the special sciences. Social psychology, on the other hand, deals with but one aspect of the social reality, namely, the psychical life of social groups. It is a special science, though fundamental to all the other special social sciences on their subjective side, just as the biological "theory of population," or demography, may be considered fundamental to them on their objective side. As the fundamental subjective science of society, social psychology is one of the most important elements in that final synthesis of subjective and objective societary facts which sociology seeks to effect.

The beginnings of social psychology as a scientific discipline are to be found in the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal. But the ambiguity<sup>1</sup> in the German word, as well as the semi-mystical philosophy associated with it by some, are not to be

<sup>1</sup> "Völkerpsychologie" is often, *e. g.*, interpreted to mean "race-psychology." But, according to our position, there evidently could be a "race-psychology" only if the race be supposed to form in some sense a single society, a functional whole. Again, if by "Völkerpsychologie" is meant "the comparative psychology of races," it is evidently merely a chapter in genetic psychology, and is not "social psychology," as we have defined the science.

carried over into the modern science. Social psychology, though not disclaiming or ashamed of its origin, must claim a process of growth; as a conception, at least, it has been constantly increasing in clearness and definiteness with the development of the general science of which it forms a branch. In the meanwhile, there has grown up also from the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal a science which studies the socio-psychical phenomena of primitive and savage peoples. This is modern folk-psychology. It may be roughly conceived as being related to social psychology in general as child-psychology is to individual psychology. At any rate, it seeks to find among the so-called nature peoples the simplest beginnings of the complex socio-psychological phenomena of modern societies.

The field of social psychology may be thus marked off with sufficient clearness from other fields of psychological investigation; but the question, some may say, remains whether there is any portion or aspect of reality which corresponds to the territory assigned to the science; whether or not social psychology is anything more than an imaginary, fictitious science without a basis of facts. Hitherto in our discussion it has been assumed that the psychical life of society is such an evident aspect of reality as to be hardly needful of any special process of proof; and such we hold it to be. But the question is, of course, a legitimate one, and demands formal consideration. Is there, then, a collective psychical life, in which the psychical life of the individual is but a constitutive element? Or is the psychical life of society but a figment of the speculative imagination of sociologists; a name for the mere sum total of individual psychical phenomena, not itself an organized unity? In answer to such questions the older social psychologists have rightly pointed to such phenomena as public opinion, the *Zeitgeist*, national ideals, customs, and institutions, language, tradition, and mythologies. They have shown that these are organic growths, and in no sense mere summations or averages of the psychical expressions of individuals. They are, that is, products of a common life which is organically unified, though constituted of individual elements. Without group-life, without a general life-process which includes

all the individual lives of the group, these socio-psychical products could not possibly have arisen. The *Zeitgeist*, for example, is not merely an expression of individual interests and activities; it is much more an expression of the interest and activities of the national or cultural group as a whole. If it rested upon purely individual interests, it would be without a principle of organization and could not manifest those uniformities of development which have been so often noted by philosophers and historians. It is inconceivable, indeed, that any of the phenomena we have mentioned should either arise or exist unless there is some general process back of them which includes and organically interrelates the psychical processes of individuals. The conclusion, therefore, is that there could be no such phenomena as public opinion, the *Zeitgeist*, tradition, social ideals, and the like, if the individuals of a social group were psychically autonomous and independent. But if there is a general social psychical process of which these phenomena are the expressions, then there can be no objection to examining the method or technique of that process; and this constitutes the ample field of investigation for social psychology.

Another argument that has been used to prove the reality of the psychical life of social groups, and especially of nations, has been the appeal to direct experience. Every traveler, even under the homogeneous conditions of modern western civilization, has noted the immense difference between the psychical atmosphere of one country and that of another. He has found on crossing national boundaries, not only different institutions, customs, and beliefs, but he has found different ways of thinking, a different philosophy of life, different ideals, motives, and interests, all so fundamentally at variance with his own, and yet so uniformly manifested throughout the national group, as to suggest that nations as well as individuals have a psychical life, distinct from that of all other nations. These facts have been expressed in such sayings as, "Every nation is a state of mind," and in the common attribution of individuality to states. Of course, the appeal to direct experience in this case proves nothing; it is only worthy of note because it indicates some truth

lying back of the perceptions. The perception that a nation is an individuality, indeed, may be found to have more than a mere metaphorical basis.

But the real proof of the existence of socio-psychical processes is found in the fact that social groups *act*, that they are functional unities capable of making inner and outer adjustments. The fact that the activities of individuals are constantly coördinated into larger group-acts or activities, and that these group-activities vary and succeed one another according to observed uniformities, like the acts of an individual, necessitates the supposition of some principle of organization. This principle of organization can be no other on the psychological side than a psychical process which extends throughout the group and unifies it—though set up, of course, by the psychical interaction of its individual elements. It may be doubted if any group-act can take place without such a principle of organization. Even the simple impulsive reaction of a nation to an injury by a foreign foe presupposes an organized life; and if organized at all, then necessarily on its psychical side. The fact that societies are functional wholes, then, is the fact upon which all proof of the existence of socio-psychical processes must rest; for upon it depends the whole series of phenomena which social psychology investigates—social organization, social institutions, customs, tradition, language, public opinion, etc. Every recognition of the fact that societies are functional unities carries with it implicitly the recognition of the reality of socio-psychical processes. The effort of all sociological writers, for example, has been to prove the reality of a social process, while of late an increasing number have striven to show that this process is essentially or predominantly a psychical one. Thus the reality of socio-psychical processes has been implicitly recognized; and there can be no more objection to framing a science to investigate their technique or mechanism than there is to a science of the technique of individual psychical processes. Such a science is, indeed, inevitable, call it what we may, sociology or social psychology, although the latter name will seem preferable to those who hold, with the writer, that the science is a part of general psychology.



We have styled social psychology the science of the mechanism or technique of socio-psychical processes. Just as individual psychology does not investigate directly the psychical elements of individual consciousness, but rather the mechanism of psychical processes, so the task of social psychology is to examine, not public opinion, language, customs, institutions, and the like, as products of the collective psychical life, but the mechanism of the socio-psychical processes through which these products arise and change. This is no arbitrary limitation of the field of social psychology, but a necessity. Just as it has been found in individual psychology that only the mechanism of psychical processes can be reduced to scientific formulation, so it will be found in social psychology. The work of the latter, then, is the formulation of the method of socio-psychical processes. If it be asked with what portion of the psychical nature of the individual social psychology will particularly deal, when the group is regarded as constituted of individual elements rather than as a unity, the answer is, with the instinctive, impulsive, affective side of the individual. The reason for this reply is plain. The intellectual side of the individual represents the choice of means and, therefore, can be, without danger to the group, individual; but the impulsive, affective side represents the choice of ends, and, therefore, must be, and is, organized more fully into the life of the group. The impulsive, habitual, emotional side of the life of the individual, in other words, is normally submerged, as it were, in the life of his group; while the rational, cognitive side is left freer and so is more peculiarly individual. Social psychology, accordingly, will deal especially with the former, in so far as it considers the individual as an element in the social whole; and while it may not encroach upon the field of individual psychology in its consideration of the impulsive, affective side of the individual, it is just here that an enrichment of the latter science may be expected from the development of a social psychology.

We do not shrink from stating and defending the parallelism between the individual and society which has been freely implied throughout the argument of this series of papers. The

parallelism is of course a functional one, not structural. Like any other parallelism observed in nature, it is good only as far as it goes; it is scientifically useful as a clue in discovery, but it ought not to be converted into a dogma to which all facts are made to conform. The parallelism between the psychical life of the individual and that of society is not a new perception, but has long been made use of by social thinkers. It has recently been restated by Professor Baldwin as a parallelism in functioning and in development<sup>1</sup>—the only form, it seems to us, in which it is defensible. Some parallelism between the individual and society is, indeed, almost a necessity of thought. Every attempt to apply psychology in the interpretation of history implies such parallelism. A nation can only be thought of as a functional unity, and so in some sense as an individuality, if thought of as a whole; therefore, any psychological principle which may be used to interpret some movement, some period of development or transformation, in its history will necessarily be a principle which will apply equally to the life of the individual. Hence those who are quickest to deny all parallelism between the individual and society will be found, nevertheless, implying such parallelism in their interpretations of history.

Social psychology, then, in regarding social groups as functional unities, necessarily regards them as individualities or individuals. It does not say that they are individuals; it is not called upon to enter upon the metaphysical question as to what constitutes an individual. It holds to the empirical standpoint, and merely says that *for purposes of interpretation* social groups may be regarded as individuals, because they are found to exhibit the same general laws of function and development. But, while a parallelism in functioning and development may be demonstrable, the social psychologist must ever bear in mind the vast difference between the psychical life of the individual and that of society, especially on the side of structure. The psychical life of the individual is highly unified, both structurally and functionally. In all the higher reaches of organic life individual organisms usually present a unified consciousness;

<sup>1</sup> *Social and Ethical Interpretations of Mental Development*, pp. 512-15, 521-3.

but social groups present no such unified consciousness. In them consciousness is discrete, resident in the individual elements, not in a specially differentiated organ. They are, structurally, then, of a much lower type than their individual elements. A socio-psychical process is possible only through the psychical interaction of the individual elements. The unity of the socio-psychical process, therefore, is almost purely a functional one. The failure to perceive clearly this truth and its implication, that the parallelism between the psychical life of the individual and that of society is almost wholly on the functional side, has been, in our estimation, the cause of much of the unreality and seeming absurdity of many attempted social psychologies in the past.

In all that has just been said the organic nature of society is plainly implied. The psychical parallelism asserted between the individual and the social group may, indeed, from one point of view, be regarded as a corollary of the theory that the social group is an organism. We are evidently, then, under the burden of defending the organic theory of society. Just at present this theory is in disrepute, perhaps justly so, because of the absurd extremes to which it has been carried by some of its supporters. But that society is an organism, in the broad sense of that term, no one who has examined all the facts in the case can reasonably doubt. The organic nature of the societary life is as much a fact as the chemical nature of physiological processes, and is just as demonstrable. Properly understood, the proposition should be indeed self-evident. The arguments in favor of this view have been ably stated by several writers,<sup>1</sup> and need not be repeated here; but one or two points may be noted. One is the well-known biological fact that the tendency of living matter is to assume functional, and so organic, relations with other living matter with which it comes into contact. Probably it was thus that multicellular forms arose from the original unicellular forms. Now, it would seem that this principle would continue to act in the case of multicellular forms coming into more or less functional contact with each other through living together in groups. We should expect the individuals of the group to become organically related among themselves, and the group as

<sup>1</sup> See especially MACKENZIE'S *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, chap. iii.

a whole to become so organized as to constitute in a very real sense a low type of organism; and this is exactly what we find. Again, the organic nature of the life of the species is conceded by all biological thinkers; yet the arguments which are used to support this truth could be used with double their force in defense of the theory of the organic nature of societary life. And it is safe to say that no more is meant in principle in the one case than in the other. The organic nature of society is, indeed, the presupposition upon which all social science rests. A science of societary activities, as distinct from a science of individual activities, is absurd if society does not constitute an organic unity. The opposition to the organic theory of society comes from those who are anxious to emphasize the psychical side of the social process. They fail to see that that process could have no psychical side if it were not fundamentally an organic process; that society as a psychical fact presupposes society as an organic fact. The answer to those who wish to regard society merely as a "psychological organization" is, then, that all psychological organization presupposes biological organization.<sup>1</sup>

While social psychology must rest upon the organic nature of society as the presupposition of all its investigations, it must distinguish carefully between the fact of the organic nature of society and analogies with biological organisms which may as often be misleading as helpful. The differences between social groups and biological organisms are obvious, and fundamental. Not only are the latter more highly unified, both structurally and functionally, than the former, but there is also a qualitative difference. In the biological organism consciousness is resident in the organism as a whole, while in the social group consciousness is resident in the individual elements, giving these a large degree of autonomy. The result is that, while in the biological organism the principle of organization is entirely physiological, in social groups the principle of organization tends to become more and more psychological as we pass from lower to higher stages of development. In the lowest societies of the animal world only the physiological principle of organization is visible,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MARSHALL, *Instinct and Reason*, p. 183.

but when we reach the human plane, artificial groups, as it were, based upon interests, purposes, etc., appear within the natural, genetic groups. Although these "artificial" groups are relatively unstable, compared with the genetic groups within which they appear, yet their persistence for considerable periods shows how largely the organization of human society has become psychological rather than physiological. It would, indeed, be easy to show that in the most advanced human societies the principle of organization is predominantly psychological. Human society may, therefore, with propriety be styled a psychical organism<sup>1</sup> — a term which has the advantage of implying at once the organic nature of its life and the dominance of the psychological over the physiological principle of organization. The social psychologist cannot go far astray with such a picture before the mind's eye to guide him in his investigation and reasoning.

The value of a social psychology worked out from the point of view of society as a functioning whole, as a "psychical organism," may be questioned. But the value of any science lies in what it can do. What such a social psychology can do in the way of explaining the life of society, and ultimately in contributing principles for the guidance of practical social activity, is the only answer to those who question the value of the science. We have tried to show in a former paper what social psychology can do in the way of explaining a few of the phenomena of society; but its full value and justification as a science will be evident only when it can show the technique of the entire socio-psychical process. When it can do this, it will be among the most practical of the sciences, and will win the gratitude of humanity, even as the physical sciences have done. The social psychologist seeks no other justification of his labors than such a practical result; and until it is attained he has faith enough in his science to be willing "to labor and to wait."

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<sup>1</sup> The expression "psychological organization," used by Professor Baldwin, seems to us less happy, not only for the reason noted in the text, but because the word "organization" is often used to imply a *voluntarily* formed association, and so smacks of the old contract theory of society.